

Burial of Cremains

For the past few years, we have shared information regarding the burial of cremated remains (also known as cremains). We encourage families to discuss details of their final disposition and do what is necessary to protect the cremated remains of their loved ones.

Funeral traditions have changed over the years. As cremation has become more popular, it has posed new challenges not faced with the more “traditional” casket funerals. Obviously, the movement and burial of caskets require different planning and equipment than is needed for urns.

We have seen these challenges first-hand in Spink County. Please take a moment to read through these. Your understanding and compliance may help many future generations of your family.

- **Mobility:**

An urn of ashes is much easier to transport long distances than a casket. We receive cremains regularly from all over the country. Right now, the United States Postal Service is the only delivery system to handle cremains and does require specific packaging. However, it is also easy for a family to transport their loved one’s cremains in a private vehicle or by shipping them in the mail to a local friend or relative.

- **Burial:**

Here is where we are still encountering many problems. We continue to be contacted by local cemetery sextons after they have discovered cremains being buried by family in a “private, family get together” or they accidentally learn of it after-the-fact. Families are choosing not to notify the cemetery sexton for multiple reasons. However, if the sexton is not notified, cemetery records will not be accurate and may cause problems in the future:

- Sextons are responsible for marking graves for the gravediggers who are hired to dig graves. The gravedigger relies on the sexton for marking the grave accurately before they dig, and sextons rely on accurate records to instruct the gravediggers appropriately. When individuals are not working with the cemetery’s sexton, there could be serious issues in the future:
 - Each cemetery has guidelines on how many urns may be buried with a casket or multiple urns in an individual grave.
 - If the sexton is unaware of a cremains burial (with or without an urn), the gravedigger may unintentionally dig up or do damage to an urn or the actual cremains already in the grave. The sextons are trying to keep detailed records of how many urns are in a grave and their position within that grave.
- If your loved one already has a headstone in a cemetery, but will not be physically buried there, please notify the sexton so the record can show no physical burial where there is a headstone. It will save confusion in the future.
- Please note that more and more cemeteries are requiring urn vaults for burial. There are a variety of vaults available, but the purpose is the same – to protect your loved one’s ashes. Your loved one’s cremains are placed in the vault, and the vault is sealed prior to burial.

- **Genealogy**

- If a person is buried without any documentation, there is a good chance that the next generations will not know the final resting place of that family member.

- As more and more cemeteries make the transition to computerized programs for burial records, if a loved one's burial has not been documented with the sexton, there will be no record online either.
- The example we refer to most is a call we received a few years ago from a family in California. They were looking for their "Aunt Martha." They thought another family member brought Aunt Martha's urn with her cremains to a local cemetery for burial and wanted us to confirm that. However, the cremains were not shipped to the funeral home, the sexton had no record of "Aunt Martha," and no documentation was ever filed to document the final resting place with the sexton, the county, or the state. To this day, "Aunt Martha" is still missing because her family cannot find anyone who remembers what happened. The family member who supposedly transported "Aunt Martha" has since passed away. In fact, they now believe "Aunt Martha's" ashes may have been in her favorite teapot instead of a traditional urn, and there is a chance that "Aunt Martha" may have been unintentionally thrown away when the family cleaned the apartment out. This family may never know what became of "Aunt Martha."

- Headstones

When we sell a headstone to a family, we rely on the sextons to mark each grave. They will flag each grave as needed, which tells the setters exactly where to place a headstone, which does require some digging. If no one knows that someone's ashes have been buried there, damage may occur to an urn, or as we've unfortunately seen, ashes disturbed or discarded because they were buried in a plastic bag without the sexton's knowledge.

- Documentation

- Documentation is required to properly register a burial.
 - It starts with the local cemetery sexton, as discussed above.
 - After the sexton has signed it, the burial permit also needs to be filed with the county where burial occurs.
 - Finally, the burial is then registered with the state.
- To improve our records of final disposition, we have implemented the following at the funeral home:
 - We complete a "receipt" document for cremains in our care.
 - We complete this document with burial information when we handle the burial, and this documentation remains with the individual's file in a fireproof cabinet.
 - When a family takes their loved one from our care, we have them sign the receipt, and only the person who signed the contract can remove their loved one from the funeral home unless they give authorization otherwise. We make a copy of their driver's license to put on file as well.
 - We include the family's intention for final disposition. For example, we make a note on the receipt that as of that date and time, the family indicated that their loved one would be "scattered in the Black Hills in the summer of 2020" or "committal service and burial on June 23, 2020." If the family changes their mind after they leave, of course, we only have on record what their intention was that day.

We encourage each family to protect their loved ones. Please take the time to contact the sexton of the cemetery, and follow the regulations in place at each cemetery. Please allow the cemetery sextons (most of whom are volunteers) to

keep accurate records for your family in the future. If you would like to assist further, we know that donations are greatly appreciated for the expensive upkeep of these cemeteries where your loved ones have been laid to rest.

Please help us, the sextons, and the gravediggers help your family for years to come. If you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact us at the funeral home (605-472-2444).

The following sextons are those we work with the most, and with their permission, have allowed us to publish their contact information:

CEMETERY LOCATION	NAME OF CEMETERY	SEXTON NAME	SEXTON PHONE #
Ashton	Ashton	Robert Oberfoell	605-380-5597
Athol	Athol	Deb Christensen	605-472-3708
Athol	St. Mary's Catholic	Robert Woodring	605-460-2853
Burdette	Burdette	Dan Bottum	605-450-0497
Conde	St. John's	Tim Van Hatten	605-382-5816
Doland	Doland	Joseph Remily	605-450-0133
Frankfort	Mt. Hope	Alan Johnson	605-472-1741
Frankfort	St. Ann's Catholic	Robert Knox	605-460-2282
Mellette	Calvary	Greg Morgan	605-887-3291
Mellette	Mellette	Craig Oberle	605-380-2535
Miller	St. Ann's Catholic	Roger Zens	605-354-2071
Northville	Fairview	Lyle Peterson	605-887-3522
Redfield	Greenlawn	City of Redfield	605-472-4550
Redfield	St. Bernard's Catholic	Kelly Hyke	605-472-2444
Tulare	Garfield	Ted Price	605-596-4315
Tulare	Graceland	Loren Marzahn	605-460-2265
Tulare	St. John's	Wayne Binger	605-450-0255
Tulare	Tulare	Ted Price	605-596-4315
Turton	St. Joseph's Catholic	Jim Becker	605-897-7636
Zell	St. Mary's Catholic	Jerome Zens	605-450-0236

We thank all sextons and gravediggers for their hard work, attention to detail, and willingness to help us serve families with professionalism and compassion. And, we thank families in advance for assisting the cemetery sextons in keeping accurate records.

Kelly and Bonnie Hyke
Hyke Funeral Home – Redfield, SD

